

March 6, 2025

LD 659

"An Act to Reduce Housing Costs by Not Requiring Fire Sprinkler Systems for Single-family Homes and Duplexes"

Chairman Curry, Chairwoman Gere, and Honorable Members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee my name is Elliott Chamberlain owner of Chamberlain Homes based out of Saco, Maine which is one of the municipalities in the state that has made residential sprinkler systems mandatory in single and two family structures. I am here today to testify in support of LD 659.

Since 2009, the State of Maine has adopted updated versions of the International Building Code which actually calls for residential sprinkler systems in single and two family but allows for states to delete that regulation during adoption of the updated code or by legislation. Maine has opted to delete that rule every year for the past 16 years when it became part of the International Building Code. The state has deleted that provision again in 2025 which goes into effect next month. As of two years ago 26 states struck this rule through legislation, 20 deleted through adoption but left it to local control, two have partial mandates and two have full mandates.

South Portland was one of the first municipalities to adopt a residential sprinkler system ordinance, due to the excessive cost they have rolled back this requirement.

After multiple conversations with insurance agents that I work with I have learned that most carriers don't offer discounts for dwellings with sprinkler systems. In fact it's the opposite, since statistics show that a home is much more likely to have a water damage claim due to a residential sprinkler system than they ever would from a fire in a home without a sprinkler system. Sprinkler systems are more prone to leaks, accidental discharge and freeze ups. And with a large water damage claim, residents run the risk of having to be placed in a high risk pool the next year.

Over 50% of the homes in Maine were built prior to 1980, which is about the time when smoke detectors became mandatory. Requiring a sprinkler system in new homes puts all of the cost, burden and maintenance on the structures that are at a lower risk of fire and does absolutely nothing for the older homes at a higher risk due to older wiring, chimneys, construction methods and building materials. The excessive cost and burden greatly outweighs the benefit.

Recently I sat with a municipal water district reviewing a project for 195 units. During the meeting it was brought up that they will need to look at the calculations to see if they could even meet the water demands of this project due to the new sprinkler system requirements. Everyone takes for granted that public water and wells will automatically supply the needs of a sprinkler system. In many cases both public and private water pressure or volume is not sufficient for these systems. Additional tanks or pumps would be needed, which will further increase the cost. Or in my case, I would need to reduce the number of units to be built.

In conclusion, we are at a turning point. All of you know that vast areas of the country are in a housing crisis. Maine is no exception. We are experiencing record high prices in the construction industry, a massive shortage of needed homes and a significant shortage of construction labor. In addition there are excessive regulations to get new projects approved coupled with the highest interest rates in 15 years and the latest tariffs which are all exacerbating the problem.

For the first time in my entire life which has been spent in Maine, both the state and private sector are realizing the connection between housing, business and the economy. We cannot work so hard together to find ways to create more housing while allowing municipalities to create massive hurdles to stop the state from reaching such a needed goal.

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